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ABSTRACT

The paper presents guidelines for presenting a workshop on Ebonics (Black English) to regular and special education teachers. The author maintains that Ebonic speakers must be able to use both the language of their community as well as standard English. Workshop participants are assigned two Ebonic speaking children to apply Ebonic theory. Six units of the proposed workshop design are described (sample subtopics in parentheses): pretest, theoretical aspects of language (social and cultural factors influencing language), dimensions of Ebonics (linguistic descriptions and historical development), practical application of sociolinguistic theory (composition and Ebonics and teaching reading to Ebonic speakers), posttest, and followup procedures. (CL)

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COMMUNICATION MAINSTREAMING OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS: GUIDELINES FOR PRESENTING A WORKSHOP ON EBONICS

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INTRODUCTION

The 1979 Ann Arbor U.S. District Court decision mandated that Ebonics (or Black English) be recognized by educators as a unique, viable, and legitimate language. Ebonics is a term coined by Williams, et al., (1975) which derives its form from two words : ebony (meaning black) and phonics (meaning sound). The term refers to the study of the language of Black people in all its cultural uniqueness. The Ann Arbor Decision has rejuvenated an issue which stirred much controversy during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Over the past decade, numerous authors, including Labov (1966); Dillard (1972); Taylor (1972); Williams (1975); and Seymour and Seymour (1977) have chronicled the historical development and unique linguistic features of Ebonics. The works of these authors preceded the Ann Arbor Decision in documenting the linguistic legitimacy of Ebonics.

In spite of the fact that the Ann Arbor Decision mandated that Ebonics be utilized as a vehicle for classroom instruction, the lack of teacher training in the area of sociolinguistics has, for the most part, precluded the implementation of this mandate. More specifically, the inadequate preparation of teachers about language in general, and sociolinguistic theory related to Black communication patterns in particular, has contributed to the overrepresentation of Black children and adolescents in exceptional education categories. These children have been misdiagnosed as being exceptional due to linguistic and cultural differences and not cognitive deficiencies.

Since language is the medium through which knowledge is transferred, Seymour and Seymour (1977), Gerken and Deichman (1979) and Bountress (1980) stress that educators must undergo an intensive formal training program which will allow them to 1) differentiate language difference from language pathology; and 2) become sensitive to their own attitudes toward alternative forms of mainstream English. Such efforts may facilitate the educator in providing an effective learning environment for children who speak Ebonics and other dialects of English.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide guidelines for presenting a workshop on Ebonics to regular and special education teachers. The philosophy of this workshop upholds the concept that to be effective communicators in a pluralistic society, speakers of ebonics must attain the skill of code-switching. That is, ebonic speakers must be adept in using both the language of their community as well as the language of mainstream America (often referred to as "standard" English).

The specific objectives of the workshop are twofold:

1. To outline an effective program for presenting theoretical information on Ebonics
2. To describe practical activities which could be used for immediate application of theory.

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE WORKSHOP FORMAT

An initial run of the two-week workshop was conducted during the 1978 Summer Session at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia. Ten regular and special education teachers from diverse professional backgrounds participated in the workshop. Readings germane to the topics of discussion were assigned daily. A renown and well published consultant in sociolinguistics served as the lecturer during the first three days of the workshop. His major responsibility was to present theoretical issues to workshop participants. Immediate application of theory was realized by assigning two Ebonic-speaking children (ages 10-15 years; one male and one female) to each participant. These children were enrolled in the National Youth Summer Recreational Program at Hampton Institute.

Workshop enrollees met with the children for one hour daily. Specific activities were assigned which focused on the analyses of the children's reading, writing and speaking skills. The participants developed a written journal about their children's communicative abilities based on these specific activities. Finally, the contents of the journals were shared during the last two days of the workshop.

WORSHOP DESIGN

The proposed workshop design includes the following units:

I. Pretest

II. Theoretical Aspects of Language

III. Dimensions of Ebonics

IV. Practical Application of Sociolinguistic Theory

V. Posttest

VI. Follow-up Procedures

A more detailed outline of each workshop component as well as a rationale for the inclusion of each unit is presented below. Following this discussion, a reference list is provided which allows potential workshop leaders to 1) explore each guideline in an indepth manner prior to presenting information to participants, and 2) utilize the reference list as a basic core of recommended readings or as a bibliography with expansion capabilities. References appear in Appendix A.

UNIT I. PRETEST

A. Language Knowledge Scale
B. Language Attitude Scale

Prior to presenting the content areas of a workshop on Ebonics, it is necessary to assess the participants' knowledge of- and attitudes toward patterns of Black communication. Acquiring this baseline data allows the workshop leader to adjust his/her topical areas and practical

activities to meet the needs of participants. In addition, change in the participants' knowledge and attitude on Ebonics can be readily measured following completion of the workshop.

Examples of published language knowledge and language attitude scales are included in the reference list. Workshop leaders are also encouraged to develop their own assessment instruments.

UNIT II. THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

A. Elements of a Language

1. Phonology
2. Syntax/Grammar
3. Semantics
4. Prosodic Features

B. Social and Cultural Factors Influencing Language

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Socioeconomic status
4. Education
5. Geographic Region
6. Ethnicity/Race
7. Systems of Family Organization
8. Peer Group

C. Dialects

Wolfram and Fasold (1974) uphold the idea that socially stigmatized dialects of mainstream English are not thrown together haphazardly, but instead, reveal an internal coherence. These dialects are recognized by Taylor (1973); Williams (1975); Smitherman (1977); Seymour and Seymour (1979); and others as having the essential elements of a language; that is phonology, syntax/grammar, semantics and prosody. Wolfram and Fasold further state that English dialects are completely adequate and acceptable as communication systems for members of the

referent community in which the dialect is used. Therefore, in order for classroom teachers to understand dialectal varieties of English, it is first necessary for them to acquire information on those linguistic elements that are recognized as components of any language. Thus, Unit II of the workshop guidelines focuses on describing the basic elements of a language and discussing the social and cultural factors which influence language behavior.

The interrelationship between language and social factors is termed sociolinguistics. As described by Williams (1970) and Williams, Hopper, and Natalicio (1977), sociolinguistics is the study of language variation (or dialects) that can be reliably correlated with a set of social factors, including socioeconomic status, ethnicity/race, age, sex and education. Dialects of English are viewed by these authors as being consistent, well-ordered grammatical systems exercised within the norms of a particular subgroup of speakers.

In addition to the interaction between social factors and language, several cultural factors (i.e., geographic region, systems of family organization, peer group) also influence linguistic behavior. Seymour and Seymour (1977) view dialects of American English as resulting from divergent cultures, ethnic groups, educational levels and residential patterns. Similarly, in a classical study of language acquisition of Black children in Louisiana, Ward (1971) concluded:

> Any description of a child's acquisition of communicative competence begins with his life space, that is the physical environment and the individuals who make up his network of interactions (p. 19).

Through discussing the structural components of language, and those sociocultural factors influencing language, workshop leaders are better able to legitimize Ebonics and other social dialects as being functional and appropriate communicative systems that are used by specific groups of people to express their needs, beliefs, thoughts and feelings.

UNIT III. DIMENSIONS OF EBONICS

A. Standard Ebonics
B. Nonstandard Ebonics
C. Hypercorrect Mainstream English
D. Linguistic Descriptions of Ebonics
E. Historical Development of Ebonics

Of particular importance in presenting information on Ebonics is to outline for participants the various dimensions of this unique form of Black communication. In a broad sense, Ebonics is defined as the totality of language used in Black communities across the United States (Williams, 1975). Many linguistic varieties exist which can be identified as representative of Ebonic speech/language patterns. Thus, as a language, Ebonics is viewed as being multidimensional in nature, containing the elements of phonology, syntax/grammar, semantics and prosody. In addition, Ebonics is influenced by the sociocultural factors outlined in Unit II.

As described by Taylor (1973), a comprehensive and accurate view of Ebonics must account for the fact that:

1. The language of Ebonics varies greatly as a function of the social context of the speaking situation (formality vs. informality)

2. Ebonics also varies according to the educational level of its users (educated vs. uneducated).

Any treatment of Ebonics that does not take these variables into account is not only inacurate, but serves to perpetuate the stereotypic image of Black speakers as being unidimensional and homogenous in their linguistic style. The unique feature of Taylor's model is that it eliminates the comparison of Ebonics with forms of English used by other racial/ethnic groups. In essence, Ebonics is looked upon as a language in and of itself with several dialects.

The three dimensions of Ebonics as delineated by Taylor (1973) include 1) standard Ebonics; 2) nonstandard Ebonics; and 3) hypercorrect mainstream English. Using the two sets of variables noted previously (i.e., formality vs. informality; educated vs. uneducated), Taylor defines each dimension as follows:

> Standard Ebonics: The mode of speech/language employed by educated Black speakers in a formal communicative setting.
>
> Nonstandard Ebonics: The primary mode of communication employed by less educated Black speakers in an informal setting. One should keep in mind, however, that standard Ebonic speakers have the capacity to - and, at times, actually do use nonstandard Ebonics.
>
> Hypercorrect Mainstream English: A mode of communication used by nonstandard Ebonic speakers in a formal communication setting.

Implicit in Taylor's categorization system is the idea that the more "formal" the communicative setting the more likely the speaker is to employ a standard Ebonic speech mode. In a similar vein, the higher the educational level of the Ebonic speaker, the greater the chances are that he/she has been exposed to and assimilated mainstream English features and communicative styles. Thus, Taylor suggests that the standard Ebonic speaker

and the mainstream English speaker are similar in terms of their usage of phonological, syntactic, and semantic features. They differ, however, in terms of prosody and nonverbal communication. In contrast, Taylor states that standard Ebonic speakers and nonstandard Ebonic speakers differ along the lines of phonology, syntax and semantics.

Although Taylor's model presents a unique conceptual framework for examining Black communication, to date, no empirical evidence exists which verifies this theory. However, numerous sociolinguists have reported the linguistic features which differentiate mainstream English and Black English. A composite of these features are presented in the monograph coauthored by Williams and Wolfram (1977).

The linguistic features of Ebonics have presented a challenge to numerous researchers who have attempted to explain the origins of this unique communication system. Essentially, three major themes abound regarding the historical development of Ebonics. Briefly, these themes include:

1) The Intrinsic Inadequacy Viewpoint: Ebonics is an unsystematic child-like language resulting from physical, genetic, sociocultural and/or psychological deficits.

2) The Archaic English Viewpoint: Ebonics is not "Black speech", but rather, it is an extension of the archaic English of Britain and American Southern English.

3) The Continuity of Africanisms Viewpoint: Ebonics is a a language derived from a pidginization/creolization process. The central philosophy expoused in this view is that the origins of Ebonics are African languages and not English. Furthermore, Ebonics conforms to the general priniciples of two languages coming in contact.

A more detailed explanation of these developmental theories of Ebonics appear in the works of Turner (1949), and Dillard (1972).

UNIT IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC THEORY

A. Practice in Identifying and Analyzing Ebonic Speech
B. Composition and Ebonics
C. Teaching Reading to Ebonic Speakers
D. Teacher Attitudes: The Omnipresent Confounding Variable

In Unit IV, we present practical activities which allow workshop participants to immediately apply the theoretical information obtained on Ebonics. Essential to this portion of the workshop is the organization of field experiences which allow participants to have face-to-face contact with Ebonic speakers. Workshop leaders are encouraged to modify or expound upon the proposed activities to meet the specific needs of participants.

A. Practice in Identifying and Analyzing Ebonic Speech

1. Record a language sample of 25 utterances from the Ebonic speaker(s).

   a. Identify the phonological, grammatical and semantic features that are representative of Ebonics.

   b. Select six features (two phonological; two grammatical; two semantic) and develop a lesson plan for each, progressing through the code switching system proposed by Irwin Feigenbaum (1969).

B. Composition and Ebonics

1. Have each child write a creative story consisting of a minimum of 10 sentences. Analyze the written passage based on editorial considerations proposed by Wolfram and Fasold (1974). Specifically, identify those errors which are:

   a. Organizational/logical (poor sequential organization of thoughts

   b. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar not traceable to Ebonic linguistic patterns

   c. Spelling, punctuation and grammar characteristics that represent Ebonic linguistic patterns

Wolfram and Fasold advocate developing lesson plans which first minimize errors not found in the rule systems of Ebonics or mainstream English, and then developing plans which incorporate code-switching strategies for the Ebonic writer to adapt. Modifications of Feigenbaum's oral expressive code-switching procedures can be readily used on writing tasks.

C. Teaching Reading to Ebonic Speakers

1. Have each Ebonic speaker read a story written in Ebonics and note the comments and attitudes they have toward the language.

2. Read a story to Ebonic language users that is transcribed in a mainstream English version and an Ebonic language version. Have the Ebonic speaker answer content questions about the story (presented in both mainstream English and Ebonics). Compare the number of correct responses obtained based on the alternative versions of questions.

3. (For children) - Have the Ebonic language user make up a story. Record and transcribe the story verbatim from the tape and in a mainstream English version. Utilize these basic readers to teach code switching comprehension and oral reading.

D. Teacher Attitudes: The Omnipresent Confounding Variable

1. Have teachers read and report on the literature available that addresses both teacher and community attitudes towards ebonics.

2. Set up a debate by dividing participants into four groups. Each group is responsible for presenting one of the following positions:

   a. Total eradication of Ebonic speech
   b. Instruction in Ebonics only for native speakers
   c. Bidialectalism for Black children and adults only
   d. Teach all children and adults to be competent understanders and users of Ebonics and mainstream English irrespective of race/ethnicity.

UNIT V. POSTTEST

The posttest should be an alternate form of the language knowledge and language attitude scales used during the pretest.

UNIT VI. FOLLOWUP PROCEDURES

Approximately two months following completion of the initial workshop, correspondence was sent to all participants which included the following items:

1. A list of names, addresses, phone numbers and professional disciplines of each participant .

2. Information on current articles, books, monographs and audiovisual materials that addressed issues related to Ebonics and applied sociolinguistics.

3. A questionnaire which inquired about the use of workshop materials in the classroom.

This information was distributed to participants during the first month of the new school year so that teachers could incorporate issues related to use of Ebonics as a tool of instruction into their respective curricula.

SUMMARY

This paper has described the basic content areas used by the authors in presenting a workshop on Ebonics, recognized by Williams (1975) and his colleagues as being the "True Language of Black Folks". A rationale for inclusion of each unit was presented, along with practical activities which allow potential workshop participants to immediately apply theoretical issues by having experiential training with Ebonic language users. Workshop leaders should be professionals who have a background in linguistic theory. A speech-language pathologist or language arts teacher are possible candidates. It is felt that the workshop will fill the existing gap in the professional preparation of educators who anticipate or are currently interacting with Ebonic speaking children and adolescents. The informed, sensitive professional will be better prepared to incorporate Ebonics as a teaching modality when the linguistic composition of children in the classroom requires that alternative forms of communication be utilized.

Although the workshop is designed to familiarize regular and special education teachers with Ebonics, modifications of the basic workshop format could assist in giving paraprofessionals amd parents a different perspective on the effectiveness of Ebonics as a system of communication in Black communities.

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APPENDIX A

Additional References on Ebonics

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